

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 15641 241938Z

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2420

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL HONG KONG

AMCONSUL MADRAS

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 15641

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN, PFOR

SUBJECT: MRS. GANDHI VISITS SIKKIM

SUMMARY: THE PRIME MINISTER'S NOVEMBER 19-20 VISIT TO THE FORMER INDIAN PROTECTORATE OF SIKKIM UNDERSCORED GOI INTEREST IN THE STRATEGICALLY PLACED IF LIGHTLY POPULATED (300,000) STATE. DURING HER VISIT THE PRIME MINISTER MADE PUBLIC REFERENCES TO THE BANGLADESH SITUATION AND SINO-INDIAN RELATIONS AND STRESSED THE GOI INTENTION TO SEE THAT SIKKIM'S SEPARATE CULTURAL IDENTITY IS PRESERVED. MRS. GANDHI MET WITH THE CHOGYAL, BUT BOTH REFUSED TO DISCLOSE THE CONTENT OF THEIR DISCUSSION. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER GANDHI VISITED SIKKIM FROM NOVEMBER 19-20. THIS WAS HER FIRST TRIP TO THE FORMER HIMALAYAN PROTECTORATE SINCE ITS MERGER WITH INDIA IN APRIL 1975. THE VISIT PUT SIKKIM BACK ON THE FRONT PAGES OF DELHI NEWSPAPERS AND UNDERSCORED THE GOI'S INTEREST IN THE STRATEGICALLY PLACED IF LIGHTLY POPULATED (300,000) STATE.

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PAGE 02 NEW DE 15641 241938Z

2. IN HER PUBLIC REMARKS, MRS. GANDHI REFERRED TO BOTH THE SITUATION IN BANGLADESH ANEHINO-INDIAN RELATIONS DURING HER TWO DAY TRIP (NEW DELHI 15539, 15541). SHE HELICOPTERED TO SEVERAL FORWARD AREAS IN NORTHERN SIKKIM TO ADDRESS GROUPS OF INDIAN SOLDIERS, MET WITH STATE CONGRESS PARTY OFFICIALS IN GANGTOK AND LAID FOUNDATION STONES FOR A NEW GOVERNMENT HOSPITAL AND SECRETARIAT BUILDING IN THE STATE CAPITAL.

3. IN HER PUBLIC REMARKS, MRS. GANDHI STRESSED THE GOI'S INTENTION TO SEE THAT SIKKIM'S SEPARATE CULTURAL IDENTITY IS PRESERVED, EXPRESSED SATISFACTION THAT THE PEOPLE OF SIKKIM ENJOYED REPRESENTATIVE GOVERNMENT AND PROMISED THAT THE CENTER WOULD PROVIDE INCREASED ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO THE STATE.

4. THE CHOGYAL: AT A PRESS CONFERENCE, THE PRIME MINISTER REFUSED TO DISCUSS THE SUBSTANCE OF A MEETING WITH THE

CHOGYAL. SOUTH ASIA A.P. BUREAU CHIEF MYRON BELKIND WHO ACCOMPANIED THE VISIT TELLS US THAT OFFICIALS REJECTED HIS REQUEST TO MEET THE EX-RULER. BELKIND MANAGED TO CROSS PATHS WITH THE CHOGYAL ON A GANGTOK ROAD. THE LATTER APPEARED IN GOOD HEALTH AND CHEERFUL, BUT HE ALSO DECLINED TO DISCUSS HIS MEETING WITH THE PRIME MINISTER. BELKIND WAS IMPRESSED BY THE MONEY THE GOI IS PUTTING INTO THE STATE FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROGRAMS. HE FOUND CONSIDERABLE INFIGHTING WITHIN THE SIKKIM CONGRESS, RESENTMENT AMONG SIKKIM CONGRESS POLITICIANS OF INDIAN CIVIL SERVANTS AND THE DEGREE OF INDIAN CONTROL OF DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES, AND LINGERING RESENTMENT BY NEPALESE OF THE CHOGYAL (ONE PERSON THREW A ROCK AT THE CHOGYAL'S AUTO WHILE BELKIND WAS TALKING WITH HIM). BELKIND'S CONCLUSION: THE INDIANS IN THE LONG-RUN WILL INHERIT THE SAME PROBLEM THE CHOGYAL ENCOUNTERED -- ANTAGONISM AND HOSTILITY AMONG THE NEPALI MAJORITY IN SIKKIM.

5. BELKIND INFORMS US THAT HE WILL BE FILING A FEATURE STORY ON SIKKIM WHICH WILL PROBABLY BE RUN IN U.S. CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 15641 241938Z

NEWSPAPERS OVER THE WEEKEND.
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